

Opening Up

For the next few weeks, I am going to put you to work. I am going to share with you, one person's relationship with God and in doing so, my goal is to invite you to think about how your relationship with God is and how you hope it might become. It is going to be a time of reflection, self-examination, introspection.

A Pastoral care professor in seminary told us that she felt all human emotions fall under one of 5 categories – mad, sad, glad, afraid, and confused. Have you ever experienced an emotion that does not fall under one of those categories? Mad includes anger, frustration, that kind of thing. Glad includes love, joy, happiness, thanksgiving. Sad is like disappointment, feeling let down, discouraged, lonely.

Some of us access our emotions easily....others not so much. Some of us are willing to express all our emotions to God. Some of us are only comfortable express our glad emotions to God. A few of us are ok being mad with God. Many of us, at one time or another have been afraid of God, and often, we are confused when it comes to God. Would you agree? (Slide #1)

Generally speaking, we express our greatest range of emotion with those we are closest to.....our partners, or very close friends. So what does this say about our relationship with God already?

If we are going to have some sort of relationship with God, it assumes we have some perception of God. So there you are, sitting at Tim's having a nice cup of coffee. Someone asks you to describe God, what would you say? (Slide #2)

The person whose journey I am going to share with you, believed that God was everywhere and could see everything. Do you concur? Thus, God saw her when she stole candy, kissed some boys, drank hard liquor, smoked, and lied. So, based on her perception of how she should be in a perfect world, she determined that God was mad at her and was punishing her for all the bad things she had done and all the good things she had not done! Can you relate to her or do you understand all of this differently? (Slide #3)

So she tried to do all sorts of good things in order to please God. She learned the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. She was kind to others. She comforted those who needed comfort. She was always looking for ways to help others. She did everything she could do in order to try and make God happy with her.

But the girl got thinking about all this God stuff and she wondered, if God was everywhere and could see everything, and do anything, why didn't he stop her from swearing and smoking, and kissing boys, and drinking too much? She was confused! Does this make sense to you? (Slide #4)

She can't pinpoint the time or the place when it happened, but everything turned around for her. All her questions were answered and for the first time she had a sense of the Divine presence in her life....not just in her head, but in her heart, and in every part of her being. God was no longer some abstract concept, however it was she described this force we call God, part of God lived in her very being. Can you imagine?

She writes, "...so many times I had gone crawling back to God on my belly like a reptile praying, 'God if you help me this time, I promise never to bother you ever again. And this time I really mean it!'"

Can you relate?

But now, for some reason or another, everything had changed and she had a sense of the Divine presence deep in her life....in the quiet knowing of her heart. (Slide #5) She and He were finally right! She knew now, in a way she had never known before, that to believe in God means to recognize God's divine presence within you. Do you recognize that? Do you have a sense of somehow, God's Divine presence lives within you? Does it feel like that to you?

She says that now, after many years of torment and foolish choices and bad decisions, God is not some detached figure in the sky, spying on her, watching and waiting for her to make a mistake, God lives in her, and God believes in her, and God loves her. Even now, when calamity runs wild in her life, when things do not go so well, she knows that God has not left the building and God is not out to get her. She knows the Spirit of God is within her and goes with her, even through all the chaos and muck of life!

She says that to believe in God, does not mean that she never slips up. It does not mean that all her choices are good ones. It does not mean that she is always kind and patient, and thoughtful and empathetic. But she knows how to get back there. "Right where I am, God is, and God believes in me, and God loves me." (Slide #6)

After years of study, she claims this as truth for everyone - "You must have a deep desire to know the Divine that is not based on anything other than the deep desire. You cannot want it for any other reason other than to want it."

Our desire to know God is not so that we will have a free pass through life, that trouble will never come to our door, there can be no alternative agendas. Our desire to know God must be pure. That we might live our lives reflecting that love which lives within each or us as the Diving presence.....What does the Lord require of us....justice, mercy, humility, kindness, patience, hopefulness, forgiveness, love.

So what does it take for you and me :

(Slide #7) -to believe in God, not just with your head, but with your heart

(Slide #8) -to embrace the Divine presence within.....to believe that something of God, actually lives within you

It takes:

-your willingness to fail, to acknowledge that you will fall back into old habits, but you are determined to try again. Whenever you challenge the old ways with the new ways, the old ways will fight you tooth and nail. (Slide #9) It is OK to fail. It is even expected.

(Slide #10) -your determination to be patient and loving with yourself and others because that is what God does all the time

Someone once said that if you are comfortable, you are not growing. (Slide #11) If you want to grow the Divine within your life, if you want God's presence to grow within your heart, you must breathe in the change....breathe in the love, the strength, the peace, the joy, the hope, the kindness to yourself and others. And once you breathe it in, you can breathe it out.

I have shared with you the acronym WIFIM (Slide #12) What's in it for me?

So I ask you, why do you want to take the journey deeper into the heart of God? Why do you want the presence of God that is already within you to grow? Why would you search for God when you are doing just fine as it is? What's in it for you?

Have you ever heard this before –

(Slide #13) You are the light of the world.

(Slide #14) You are the salt of the earth.

(Slide #15) I am the vine, you are the branches.

If you are not going to impact this world for good and for God, then who is?

Amen